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THE IMPACT OF THE SEXUALLY VITAL WOMAN
IN WILLA CATHER'S MY ANTONIA AND A LOST LADY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Amy Rafferty

1993


APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment
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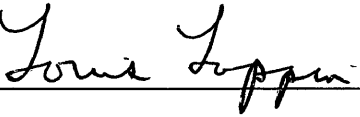
MASTER OF ARTS


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ABSTRACT

This essay examines Willa Cather's use of strong and independent female characters in her stories. The issue of the sexually vital female character with her overwhelming impact on the less powerful male character is central to many of Cather's later novels, particularly My Antonia (1918) and A Lost Lady (1923)-- two novels which each contain a male character who attempts to come to terms with his feelings for an independent woman and the way that woman has influenced him. In My Antonia, Jim Burden writes Antonia Shimerda's life story according to his own memories. Cather deals with a similar male idealization of a female in A Lost Lady, except that, in this story, Niel Herbert develops a fascination with a much older woman, Marian Forrester. Jim and Niel's changing reactions to these two headstrong women reflect the influence of the females on the young men's developing sexuality. Each man responds differently to the rejection of his idealized female, thus bringing the issue of gender role reversal to the forefront of the argument. In addition, Cather's inclusion of nature imagery accentuates the sexuality theme running throughout the two novels. By the end of both novels, each man gains a better understanding of himself through acknowledging his infatuation with the sexually vital female character.

THE IMPACT OF THE SEXUALLY VITAL WOMAN
IN WILLA CATHER'S MY ÁNTONIA AND A LOST LADY

As an author, Willa Cather created female characters similar to herself--- strong and independent. In their respective novels, the strong and independent characters Ántonia Shimerda of My Ántonia (1918) and Marian Forrester of A Lost Lady (1923) are set against the troubled and indecisive Jim Burden and Niel Herbert. Jim and Ántonia grow up together sharing many new experiences and some painful episodes. While Niel and Marian also share some memorable experiences, their age difference influences their perception of events in important ways. Both young men find themselves strongly influenced by these sexually vital women.

Cather's reversal of the typical sexual characteristics (weak, dependent, and modest) associated with late nineteenth-century literary heroines reflects her earlier fascination with dependent men and gender role reversal. For example, in her first novel, Alexander's Bridge (1911), Cather tells the story of a middle-aged civil engineer who is building a bridge for which he will always be remembered. While Bartley Alexander seems to have a satisfying professional and personal life, inwardly he struggles with the dilemma of leaving his wife, Winifred, for a woman, Hilda Burgoyne, he once loved and who manages to renew his youthful energy when they meet again later in life. However, once he decides to forsake Winifred, his creative abilities fail him and he dies when the bridge

he is building collapses. The ending of this story illustrates how essential Winifred is to Alexander's very existence. Two years later, in O Pioneers! (1913), Cather created the strong female protagonist Alexandra Bergson. Alexandra holds the family farm together after her father's death and despite her brothers' persuasions to move back east. She realizes that she can never possess the land, but through hard work and much frustration, Alexandra can reap satisfaction from making her fields prosper. Her perseverance draws her long-time friend Carl Linstrum back to the prairies and into her life permanently as her husband. Alexandra's determination and endurance lead Sharon O'Brien to call her "Cather's female Alexander, a creator and a conqueror, [who] possessed by the land more than possessing it, rejects a model of ownership and authorship based on the rights of dominance and force" (154). This issue of the sexually vital female character with her overwhelming impact on the less powerful male character is central to many of Cather's later novels, particularly My Ántonia and A Lost Lady--- two novels which each contain a male character who attempts to come to terms with his feelings for an independent woman and the way that woman has influenced him.

In My Ántonia, Jim Burden writes Ántonia Shimerda's life story according to his own memories and the way he wants to remember her in his heart. Cather begins the

novel with Jim changing the title from just simply "Ántonia" to "My Ántonia" as if to claim that even if he could not possess her, at least he could preserve his own memories and idealistic view of her. Cather describes Jim's action like this: "He went into the next room, sat down at [the] desk and wrote across the face of the portfolio 'Ántonia.' He frowned at this moment, then prefixed another word, making it 'My Ántonia.' That seemed to satisfy him" (Antonia 2). Jim Burden's development into manhood is so strongly linked to his relationship with Ántonia that her story is in many ways his story too. For, like Ántonia, Jim is uprooted from his "home" and placed in an entirely new environment, and since Jim has already lost his parents, he knows how Ántonia suffers after her father commits suicide. Although Jim and Ántonia originally came from two different worlds, they share many common fears and hopes together on the prairie.

Cather deals with a similar male idealization of a female in A Lost Lady, except that, in this story, Niel Herbert develops a fascination with a much older woman, Marian Forrester. Like Jim Burden, Niel remembers certain episodes he shared with Marian in order to preserve his idealized image of her, and to work through his emotions surrounding the events that contradict the portrait he once held of her. In The Voyage Perilous, Susan Rosowski discusses how the tension builds throughout the story as

Cather compares Niel's ideal reality to the actual reality of the situation and of the characters. Rosowski also points out that driving this tension are two underlying impulses: "one is a historical account of Mrs. Forrester, the other an emotional experience of her" (118). Hence, the character of Marian Forrester becomes almost legendary, for not only are the details of her life described, but the very intricacies of her every movement and the impact that she has on everyone who knows her. In addition to the account of Marian's life in Sweet Water, Cather examines the effects of Marian on Niel's developing sense of manhood. Cather also uses nature imagery in both A Lost Lady and My Ántonia to highlight an overall theme of sensuality linked to the land running throughout the stories.

The nature theme is closely linked to the gender role reversal issue. The two themes often work together, accentuating one another and providing an opening for the other. For example, if Jim Burden had not moved to the strange midwestern prairies, he would not have had to rely on Ántonia Shimerda to learn the ways of the land. For although she too was new to the prairies, Ántonia was more familiar with existing on the land than Jim was, since he had come from a genteel way of life on the east coast. Similarly, the Forresters' Sweet Water estate provides the perfect setting for Niel's discovery of Marian's primal urge: their home is kept very natural, almost like a

"Garden of Eden," because the Captain refuses to drain the bottom land and allows the vines and shrubs to encircle the house.

Cather uses unusual relationships, such as the friendship between an older woman and an orphaned boy, to explore the issue of gender role reversal. For example, in their respective novels, Niel Herbert and Jim Burden often appear weak and emotional when trying to come to terms with their feelings for Marian and Ántonia. Both male characters rely on a woman for emotional support, whereas traditionally, the female characters depend upon a man for acceptance and a feeling of self-worth. In both novels, Cather's use of gender role reversal allows for a unique perspective on Marian's and Ántonia's actions. For even though Cather uses a third person narrator in A Lost Lady, what makes that novel, like My Ántonia, so powerful is the way the central male character's interpretation of the woman's actions influences the overall telling of her story. This aspect of Cather's novels has led to several critical discussions of who is the central character in her novels. These arguments also question how the women's stories are affected by the masculine interpretation.

The narrative of A Lost Lady centers upon how a troubled male character perceives the sexually vital main female character, the themes which Cather had earlier

explored in My Antonia. As previously noted, in A Lost Lady, Cather tells the story of Marian Forrester primarily through the eyes of a young man, Niel Herbert, suggesting that it is as much his story as Marian's. Many critics have examined this issue of who truly is at the center of the novel---Marian or Niel? Diane Cousineau sees both characters as equally important to the story. She argues, "Although Niel is the primary reflector, we also see Marian through the eyes of the young men on the picnic, her husband, Frank Ellinger, Ivy Peters, Adolphe Blum and the townspeople" (306); she also points out that "after the first chapter, Niel is continuously present, the perspective is largely his, and his consciousness is the only one we enter" (Cousineau 306). Cousineau asks, "What do we make of the fact, for example, that Cather chooses a figure of the opposite sex as her center of consciousness and largely identifies with him?" (307). The gender role reversal issue is crucial because Niel's sense of values and his attitude toward women are heavily influenced by what he observes Marian doing, such as her committing adultery with Ellinger. Niel cannot believe that a woman he believed to be so caring and loving would have an affair with another man who was not her husband. By Marian assuming a masculine role, she alters Niel's entire idealized view of the Forresters' perfect marriage. Niel's image of the Forresters' wonderful life together on their

beautiful estate is shattered when he sees Marian and Frank together in bed. From this point, Niel realizes that there is no such thing as a perfect marriage and feels a sense of mistrust in the opposite sex. For he has not only lost his mother at an early age, which leaves him feeling abandoned, but now Marian, who more or less assumed the role of surrogate mother to Niel whether she realizes it or not, has destroyed his image of what he believes marriage and devotion to a spouse should be. After seeing Marian as a sexually active woman, not just a mother figure, Niel must come to terms with his own sexuality as a maturing young man and not just an impotent son. Cousineau makes a similar observation by pointing out,

Inherent in sexuality is the rejection of sexuality (repression) and its very meaning is this contradiction. Because Marian Forrester embodies this very notion of ambiguity, she emerges as a symbol of sexuality in the novel and continually returns Niel to the awareness of his own sexuality, his desires and their denial. She will captivate Niel, that is, capture him in his own image. (309)

Although A Lost Lady revolves around Niel's interpretation of Marian, a third person narrator is necessary to fill in details that may not readily be noticed by Niel or to describe events that take place while he

is away. These descriptions of Marian help to explain why she behaves as she does and illustrate how Niel sometimes misinterprets the attention she pays him. For example, Marian tends to show all the men in her life affection, including the Captain, despite the the fact that their marriage is not defined in terms of sexuality, but by the lack of it, making the marriage one of convenience (Butler 35). As the Captain's wife, Marian has financial security, while he has a beautiful woman to care for him in his old age. There is rarely any mention of physical intimacy between the two besides a kiss on the cheek, yet she makes him feel special by constantly making sure he is comfortable. The Captain shows his affection by giving Marian expensive jewelry--- items that she sometimes feels uncomfortable wearing because she knows that she is not really worthy of them, due to her adulterous affairs. She wears them anyway to please her husband, since Captain Forrester "had archaic ideas about jewels; a man bought them for his wife in acknowledgement of things he could not gracefully utter. They must be costly; they must show that he was able to buy them, and that she was worthy to wear them" (Lady 41-2).

What Marian really needs is affection and adoration from a man, because her marriage lacks emotional security, even though she knows that she is one of the Captain's special "possessions" and that he loves the way she plays

hostess so well. The Captain's feelings are clear from the narrator's following description:

When the Captain drove friends from Omaha or Denver over from the station ... it gratified him to hear these gentlemen admire his fine stock ... and when they reached the top of the hill, it gratified him to see men who were older than himself leap nimbly to the ground and run up the front steps as Mrs. Forrester came out on the porch to greet them. Even the hardest and coldest of his friends ... became animated when he took her hand, tried to meet the gay challenge in her eyes and to reply cleverly to the droll word of greeting on her lips (Lady 5).

Marian realizes that her husband does like to display his collected wealth, which includes his house, his land, his livestock, his flowers and herself. As his name suggests, Forrester is "planted" in Sweet Water because there is where his possessions and his soul are rooted. In addition to this, Forrester's name represents his love of nature and his desire to protect his land from the hands of those who would like to clear it and develop it. The Captain's plot of land has special significance to him, as Brent L. Bohlke notes,

Captain Forrester ... had an almost pathological passion for planting. ... He tells of his method

for marking his land-claim: he 'cut down a young willow tree and drove the stake into the ground to mark the spot where he wished to build.' Even though he was gone from the area for a number of years, he knew the spot where he wanted to 'plant my grove and orchard.' When he was finally able to return and buy the property from the railroad, [he remembers,] 'I found my willow stake,--- it had rooted and grown into a tree,--- and I planted three more to mark the corners of my house.' (39)

Captain Forrester's need to claim and protect his land and property also carries over to his desire to protect himself from the pain of acknowledging the fact of Marian's affairs. He knows they are necessary, but does not allow himself to dwell on his pain. For example, after a dinner party one evening, Marian helps her husband get undressed and props him up with the pillows in the narrow wire bed which he must use since his accident. Marian then returns to Frank who is waiting downstairs. The Captain knows that he can no longer physically satisfy his young wife, and if he wants to have her company, he must allow her her freedom. For the Captain knows that other men are crucial to satisfying Marian's sexual vitality, she likes to be the center of attention and have male admiration. As long as Marian is happy, the Captain is also satisfied.

In contrast to her husband's need for permanence and a legacy established on his land, Marian is a free spirit. This characteristic frustrates Niel, who wants Marian to make a life for herself in Sweet Water, so that he can continue to spend time with her. However, Marian has never been rooted in one place even when she must spend the entire year in Sweet Water; she longs for the city life she once knew. Marian's characteristics and sexual vitality are also linked with the nature theme discussed previously. As Bohlke points out, Captain Forrester symbolizes planting, but Marian is associated with cutting. For example, when she and Frank Ellinger go into the woods on the pretense of collecting Christmas greenery, Adolph Blum, one of the young boys who used to fish on the Forresters' property, witnesses Marian's reaction to the cutting of cedar boughs: "When the strokes of the hatchet rang out from the ravine, he could see her eyelids flutter ... soft shivers went through her body" (Lady 67). Marian always cuts flowers for bouquets, and ironically Niel is bringing her cut flowers when he hears Marian and Frank together in bed. Marian's association with cutting,-- actually the severing of life, since the flower soon wilts once it is separated from its stem-- represents her relationship with Niel. Marian nurtures him as a young boy, tending to his wounds and feeding him, but saps the life out of their relationship as she gradually severs their ties. For example, upon

finding Marian and Frank together in bed, Niel thinks, "This day saw the end of that admiration and loyalty that had been like a bloom on his existence. He could never recapture it. It was gone, like the morning freshness of the flowers" (72). While Marian frequently makes the men "wilt" around her, her influence over them, as Bohlke points out, is "like the cutting of plants [for it] was not just a pasttime; it was ecstasy--- orgasmic" (Bohlke 39).

On the other hand, Marian herself can be thought of as the flower which needs lots of care and attention. In this way, she and Niel are alike, for he needs the nurturing that she can provide. In his article on flower imagery in A Lost Lady, Edward J. Piacentino notes the way Marian is described "as a hothouse flower who flourished under ideal environmental conditions" (66-7) while adding, "the novel's earliest flower references serve to enhance Marian Forrester's naturalness, charming vitality, and, above all, fragile innocence, characteristics one may also associate with flowers" (Piacentino 67). These characteristics attract men, like Captain Forrester, who feel the need to care for and protect Marian. They also attract men like Frank Ellinger, who are intrigued by her natural innocence on such occasions as her answering the door in just her robe, or allowing visitors to see her with flour on her face from the cake she is baking. Marian

seems oblivious to how attractive she looks just doing her everyday chores. Frank Ellinger enjoys her sometimes disheveled appearance while at the same time appreciating her ability to wear the sophisticated dresses of a rich, worldly lady.

Unlike Niel who is introspective and dependent upon people for direction in his life, Frank Ellinger is a good match for Marian since he is also a sexually vital man. Cather accentuates his own natural sex appeal by describing him as an untamed animal:

his strong white teeth, irregular and curved, gave him the look of a man who could bite an iron rod in two with a snap of his jaws. His whole figure seemed very much alive under his clothes, with a restless, muscular energy that had something of the cruelty of wild animals in it. (Lady 37)

At the same time, Frank can also look quite dapper, appearing as the well-travelled, high-society man that he is. Both Frank and Marian have a duality to their characters that makes them generally appealing to people, for they can adapt to any situation. There is a sensuality to their relationship, for Frank and Marian share sexual thrills not only through the act of intercourse, but in the form of provocative inferences and actions. For example, while saying "good night" to Ellinger,

Marian's fingers clung to the black cloth [of his jacket], as bits of paper cling to magnetized iron, ... she turned quickly away, the train of her velvet dress caught the leg of his broadcloth trousers and dragged with a friction that crackled and threw sparks. (Lady 49)

Whenever Cather uses explicit sexual imagery, Marian is the central figure, for the male characters tend to come and go throughout the story--- not one of them remains in Marian's life for many years.

Ivy Peters has the same sexual vitality as Frank Ellinger and acts as his replacement. He also makes Niel feel inferior, for throughout the story Cather always portrays Ivy as a conqueror. Although Ronald Butler notes the association of Ivy Peters with a gun, Ivy's affinity with his scalpels and dissection kit suggests an even more rugged and dangerous sensuality, for his character is cold and heartless compared to Ellinger's warmth and charm. Ivy Peters derives his sexual identity from power, control and violence. He is the antithesis of Niel Herbert.

From the novel's beginning, Ivy's knives and scalpels earn him a frightening reputation among the boys of Sweet Water. In fact, the story opens with Ivy slitting a female woodpecker's eyes, so that it flies blindly, searching for a limb in a tree where it can be protected. This bird could very well represent Mrs. Forrester, who does not

have any direction in her life, for she met the Captain when he rescued her from a hiking accident with another man. Like the bird, Marian also searches for stability and a sense of well-being, perching on whatever "limb" offers her the most security, such as her life with her husband, or, at the very least, temporary happiness, such as the time she spends with Frank. In contrast, Niel falls and sprains his arm while trying to rescue the woodpecker, which symbolizes his eventual failed rescue of Marian and the emotional pain that he will suffer. In both situations, Ivy inflicts the wounds, whether merely ruining the life of one bird, or destroying a man's property and ravishing another man's wife.

In addition to Ivy Peters' association with cutting and slicing imagery, his name also emphasizes the nature and sexuality theme, suggesting the vine itself which tends to cling and overtake the objects around it, smothering the life out of any other living things which may happen to be in its way. Ivy Peters does just this with Marian, for he assumes all control of her finances, and clears a part of her land which the Captain would never allow him to touch while he was still alive. Like the traumatic bedroom window scene of years before, Niel once again sees the truth when he goes to visit Marian, and observes Ivy Peters walk up behind her "and unconcernedly put both arms around her, his hands meeting over her breast" (Lady 145).

As Ivy's name suggests, he does literally cling to and squeeze Marian's existence in Sweet Water from her.

While Marian's sexual vitality is clearly drawn and defined-- men want to be near her, possessing her and protecting her-- Niel has trouble acknowledging her in terms of a sexually active woman, which in turn affects his own developing sexual education. Butler notes how

Cather shows Niel in his relationship with Mrs. Forrester at crucial periods in his development into manhood--- at age twelve, on the verge of adolescence; at nineteen, on the brink of maturity; at the 'natural turning point' between nineteen and twenty, ...; two years later when he has 'seen the world' ... ; and finally at around forty, when he has been able to fit his life in Sweet Water into perspective. (38)

This breakdown of the story lends itself to an examination of Niel's perceptions and interpretations of Marian's actions with other men, and the way they relate to his understanding of himself and his relationship with Marian at a particular age. As Butler points out, "Cather uses sexual imagery to reveal depths of Niel's character which he has not the maturity to recognize or understand" (38).

Niel's first recollections of Marian are seeing her stepping out of her carriage at church and "he was proud now that at the first moment he had recognized her as

belonging to a different world from any he had ever known" (Lady 33). Niel creates an idealistic image of Marian from the beginning. Niel's first direct interaction with Marian, however, occurs when he breaks his arm while attempting to rescue the woodpecker which Ivy Peters has injured. Niel awakens in pain to find Marian by his side comforting him until the doctor arrives. Niel remembers that:

He was in pain, but he felt weak and contented. The room was cool and dusky and quiet. At his house everything was horrid when one was sick ... What soft fingers Mrs. Forrester had, and what a lovely lady she was. Inside the lace ruffle of her dress he saw her white throat rising and falling so quickly. Suddenly she got up to take off her glittering rings, ... he would probably never be in so nice a place again ... Mrs. Forrester ran her fingers through his black hair and lightly kissed him on the forehead. Oh, how sweet, how sweet she smelled! (Lady 21)

During his early years, Niel finds Marian's affections to be an attractive replacement for those of his dead mother's. Niel sees her simply as a kind woman with a delightful laugh who always looks attractive; he never thinks of her in terms of a woman with her own needs and

desires. In fact, Marian is in many ways a symbol to him of what a mother should be. While Niel recognizes the lack of maternal care in his life, he is not mature enough to realize the sexual overtones of his being in Marian's bed, and perhaps his own underlying urges that he associates with Marian. Because Niel rarely sees Marian between the broken arm incident at twelve and the summer of his late adolescence, her legend is allowed to grow in his mind without any disillusion. Niel describes her as "an excitement that came and went with summer" (Lady 23). Once again Cather links the Forresters with nature by associating their arrival and departure from Sweet Water with that of the seasons. However, Niel's perception of the Forresters changes once he finds them living in Sweet Water year around.

Niel's skewed perception of Marian is emphasized by his lack of direct conversation with her. For example, when Marian visits the law office to invite Niel and his uncle to dinner, Niel remains in the back room watching her, noticing how

The veil did not in the least obscure those beautiful eyes, dark and full of light, set under a low white forehead and arching eyebrows. ... Mrs. Forrester looked at one, and one knew that she was bewitching. It was instantaneous, and it pierced the thickest hide. ... There was no

negative encounter, however slight, with Mrs. Forrester. If she merely bowed to you, merely looked at you, it constituted a personal relation. Something about her took hold of one in a flash; one became acutely conscious of her, of her fragility and grace, of her mouth which could say so much without words; of her eyes, lively, laughing, intimate, nearly always a little mocking (Lady 26-7).

While Niel may still imagine Marian as the ideal mother at this point, in many ways he unconsciously finds her physically attractive, which may also explain his desire to protect her from pain and suffering. At the same time, Niel can never fulfill the desire he feels for Marian, which frustrates him emotionally and leads to a sense of disappointment and loss. As Butler observes, "Niel Herbert's complex relationship with Marian Forrester, though never overtly sexual, has strong sexual overtones" (36-7), and Rosowski comments, "Unable to accommodate sexuality in his imaginative concept of her, Niel draws back in disillusionment" (GPQ 241). Since Niel focuses on Marian as a maternal presence in his life, he finds himself unable to accept her as a sexually attractive woman who would cheat on her husband to fulfill her own needs. Niel wants to believe Marian to be self-sacrificing instead of self-serving.

Niel can only hide behind his disillusionment so long; he soon discovers the sexual side of Marian Forrester. For example, when Niel realizes that Frank Ellinger has spent the night with Marian, he returns to the symbolic bridge. As he discards the prickly bunch of wild roses, he mutters to himself, "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds" (Lady 71). As Bohlke notes, "In that moment he begins to grow up and realize the harshness of life" (38). This episode influences Niel's developing sexuality and again it is associated with the nature theme. While Niel feels his relationship with Marian has been blemished, he does not want to break away from her entirely just yet.

Upon returning to Sweet Water after two years away at college, however, Niel discovers Marian is now having an affair with Ivy Peters, a man much despised by his peers and by Niel himself. Niel's realization of his and Marian's decaying bond is reflected in his observation of Marian: "In the brilliant sun of the afternoon one saw that her skin was no longer like white lilacs, --- it had the ivory tint of gardenias that have just begun to fade" (Lady 94). Likewise his infatuation with Marian Forrester is also slowly fading. The flower imagery emphasizes Niel's altered image of Marian, for as Piacentino notes, "Niel's shifting perceptions of flowers correspond to his own changing perspective of Mrs. Forrester, thus reinforcing the antithesis between his youthful, naive idealism and

his more practical, mature realizations about her" (71).

During this summer, Niel discovers that he may not be as significant to Marian as he would like to think, for Ivy Peters constantly intrudes upon the peaceful time that Niel had anticipated spending with the Forresters. Niel ends up feeling irritated upon many occasions. For example, he often finds Ivy walking around the property as though he owned it himself. Niel is especially annoyed when Marian allows Ivy to see her "in her wrapper and slippers, her sleeves rolled up and her throat bare to his cool impudent eyes" (Lady 100). Marian's actions illustrate that she feels just as comfortable around Ivy as she does Niel, but Niel finds this realization hard to swallow, because of his hatred for Ivy Peters and the ideals that Ivy represents.

Niel also discovers Marian's desire to trade her life in Sweet Water for one of endless parties and dancing. Marian's revelation shocks Niel:

I feel such a power to live in me, Niel. ...
It's grown by being held back. Last winter I
was with the Dalzells at Glenwood Springs for
three weeks, ... and I was surprised at myself.
I could dance all night and not feel tired.
I could ride horseback all day and be ready for
a dinner party in the evening. ... I looked well
enough. The men thought so. (Lady 106)

Marian's story disappoints Niel and his idealized image of her slowly crumbles. He begins to feel frightened for her because "When women began to talk about still feeling young, didn't it mean that something had broken?" (Lady 107) At this point in the novel, Niel's image of Marian begins to collapse rather quickly, and Niel must struggle to hold the pieces together because he does not want to see her suffer emotionally. He keeps Marian from making a fool of herself with Ellinger when he cuts the telephone cord. This symbolic cutting of the cord produces a change in Niel and Marian's relationship, for after this incident their roles are reversed. Niel feels that he must now become the caretaker of the Forrester household after the Captain's final debilitating stroke, as Marian once looked out for Niel and tended his wounds.

Once Captain Forrester dies, the novel quickly comes to an end with Niel realizing "how much his own feeling toward that lady had changed" (Lady 130). He thinks of Marian as "that lady" as though she were now some unfamiliar woman to him. Niel describes Marian as a "ship without a ballast, driven hither and thither by every wind. She was flighty and perverse. She seemed to have lost her faculty of discrimination; her power of easily and graciously keeping everyone in his proper place" (Lady 131). This part of the novel is the turning point in Niel's acceptance of Marian's frivolous nature. He tries

not to become disturbed over what he sees as Marian's inexplicable behavior. For example, when Marian invites all of the neighborhood boys over for one last dinner party, Niel understands that she is trying to recreate the past and plays along with her game. Thus, whereas in the past, the young boys, including Niel, felt important when Marian noticed them, now she gains satisfaction from young men admiring her. This and the other events of the summer bring Niel to the conclusion that Marian "preferred life on any terms" (Lady 145). Niel admits how much Marian has hurt him, for he returns to Boston with "weary contempt for her in his heart" (145), disgusted by the fact that "he had given her a year of his life, and she had thrown it away" (145). Niel reacts as though he were a jilted lover, vowing never to return and despising himself for having ever tried to help Marian. He even tries to make himself believe at one point that it was not Marian, but the Captain that had made the house so different (Lady 146). This kind of resolution is necessary to Niel's overall acceptance of what he sees as Marian's betrayal and the end of his idealization of her as the perfect replacement for the mother he had lost.

The last few pages of the novel cover many years and deal with the conclusion of Marian's life and her overall effect on Niel's emotional and sexual attitudes. Niel eventually acknowledges that he was glad that he had known

her and that "she had had a hand at breaking him in to life" (Lady 147). In some ways she was like a mother to him. Whether or not this is particularly constructive for Niel, Cather leaves unanswered. For Marian spoils his expectations of what a woman should be like and Cather intimates that Niel never marries. He only remarks, I have "known pretty women and clever ones since then,--- but never one like her, as she was in her best days" (147).

Susan Rosowski best defines the conflict Niel feels over his developing sexuality by examining the "always" theme running through the novel. For example, the Forresters enjoy their rituals--- dinner parties, toasts, and to Niel, Marian seemed "always the same" (Rosowski 128). However, once Niel loses his stable world, which was rooted in the Forresters' existence, he begins to appreciate the ideal symbolized by the Forresters. For, "even as Niel must accept the loss of Mrs. Forrester within the historical narrative (indeed, he must accept that he never possessed her, and never could have), he comes to realize her permanence on a symbolic level." Rosowski points out that, like Niel, "the reader is 'always in the process of formulating values, although he never arrives at a final formulation'" (Rosowski 128-9). As Niel admits, Marian does influence him as a child and as a young man and definitely teaches him some lessons about surviving and succeeding in difficult times. No matter how much

Niel tries to help her, however, the best that he can do for Marian and his own sense of well-being is allow her to live her life without restraining her with certain preconceived expectations for her sex.

A Lost Lady parallels many of the same themes that are central to My Ántonia. The two books share the similar theme of a significant female's influence on a young man's developing sexual identity--- along with miscellaneous other characteristics, such as chance encounters and similar settings. Just as Niel Herbert must come to terms with his idealized image of Marian Forrester, so must Jim Burden with his memory of Ántonia Shimerda. As Jim realizes that he has less and less influence over Ántonia's future, he grows frustrated like Niel Herbert, for he admires Ántonia as Niel does Marian, but neither Jim nor Niel can bear to accept Ántonia's and Marian's true selves and the type of life they choose for themselves. Both Jim and Niel want to protect the woman from pain, but fail to do so and end up suffering the more themselves from feelings of helplessness. Thus, both works end on a similar note, as Rosowski points out: "The early male myths of adventure have led to pointless wandering and lonely exile, and the women, originally assigned roles of passivity, have become the vital sources of meaning" (91).

In both novels, Jim Burden's and Niel Herbert's developing sexuality is linked to these two women who

captured their attention, forced them to see the world through different eyes, and influenced how they would perceive other women. For example, Jim Burden marries a woman who is "handsome, energetic, executive, but ... seems unimpressible and temperamentally incapable of enthusiasm" (Antonia 1)--- the opposite of the emotionally-driven Antonia Shimerda. Perhaps Jim chooses such a wife because Antonia has caused him such pain with her headstrong personality. However, a sedate wife is a safe choice for a mate because she will not place any emotional demands on him. On the other hand, Niel Herbert's marital status is never clearly stated, only that he was glad to have known Marian and he had never met anyone like her. By leaving the question of Niel's marital status unanswered, Cather reinforces the focus on Niel and Marian's relationship. To introduce another woman into Niel's life would blur the focus from his devotion to Marian and undercut the significant role she played in his development.

Cather uses the same narrative technique of a chance encounter in each novel to illustrate how Jim and Niel have accepted Antonia's and Marian's decision of creating a life with the man of her choice. However, the chance encounter occurs at different points in each narrative. Jim Burden's encounter with an old friend at the beginning provides him with the opportunity to share his recorded memories of Antonia with someone else, and, in turn, add

to his narrative. In contrast, Niel's acceptance of Marian's resolutions appears at the end of the novel, when he runs into Ed Elliot at a hotel and hears of Marian's death. Although, as Catherine McLay notes, "Niel's bias is central" (95) to A Lost Lady, just as Jim's is to My Ántonia, the placement of Jim and Niel's discovery is particularly important to the overall structure of each work and to the development of each character's sexuality. By placing Jim Burden's acceptance at the beginning of My Ántonia, Cather limits the reader's perception of Ántonia to what Jim chooses to tell. For example, Ántonia has suffered a very difficult life, in contrast to Marian Forrester. When Jim returns to visit Ántonia as a middle-aged woman, he finds a "stalwart, brown woman, flat-chested, her curly brown hair a little grizzled" (Ántonia 213-14). Rosowski notes, "then he realizes the timeless truth that resides within that reality. For the first time it is her identity rather than his idea of her that he affirms" (87). Up to this point in the novel, Jim has only seen Ántonia in terms of what she means to him, not as an individual with the need to establish her own life. Rosowski also points out that "Cather was acutely aware that our culture assigns to men the position of subject and to women that of object, and she incorporates those assumptions into her novel" (88). However, "In Ántonia, Cather contradicts these assumptions by creating a woman

who works out her individual destiny in defiance of her narrator's expectations" (Rosowski 88). Having introduced this concept in My Ántonia, Cather emphasizes the idea in A Lost Lady, but this time the defiant woman does not suffer any significantly bad consequences, for Marian goes from one relatively stable relationship/marriage to another. Niel's recollections of his time spent with Marian add to the narrative because his changing response to her actions over a period of several years offers a fresh perception of how Marian influences people.

Another similarity between the two novels is the uncertainty of who is the central character. Although the earlier novel bears the title My Ántonia, the chapter headings: "The Shimerdas," "The Hired Girls," "Lena Lingard," "The Pioneer Woman's Story," and "Cuzak's Boys" are rather general, for they refer to other characters, and do not suggest any particular infatuation by Jim with Ántonia or the idea that she is the central character. However, without her, there would not be a story. As Rosowski points out, Cather anticipates this issue and addresses it in the novel's preface, by having Jim change the title from Ántonia to My Ántonia to show that "My Ántonia is about neither Jim nor Ántonia per se, but how the two, mind and object, come together, so 'this girl seemed to mean to us the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood'" (76). Niel also associates

Marian with the pioneering spirit, and her downfall with the deterioration of Sweet Water.

Likewise, both Jim and Niel find themselves in what Rosowski terms a "pastoral, Edenic world" (77) when they are with their beloved. Jim's new life on the prairie exposes him to unfamiliar aspects of nature and different cultural experiences. He has literally been uprooted from civilization and placed in a world where everyone's existence depends upon what the land can produce. Jim and Antonia must work together to make the best of this rather wild and untamed wilderness. While Niel does not experience a physical upheaval in his world, when he spends time with the Forresters he does appreciate the differences between their cozy, loving surroundings and his rather sterile existence with his uncle. In fact, Niel

so content with a bachelor's life [that he] had made up his mind that he would never live in a place that was under the control of women, found himself becoming attached to the comforts of a well-conducted house; to the pleasures of the table, to the soft chairs and soft lights and agreeable human voices at the Forresters.

(Lady 57)

Both Antonia and Marian know how to make a man feel comfortable and desirable. Jim and Niel find a woman's presence to be soothing. The fact that both Jim and Niel

have lost their parents leaves them susceptible to Ántonia's and Marian's influence, particularly because of the way both females accept them as part of the family no matter what the circumstances, even when Ántonia and Marian realize that Jim and Niel do not approve of the way they themselves are living and conducting their affairs.

Jim Burden and Niel Herbert return to Ántonia and Marian several times over the years in hopes of altering the women's lives, or in an attempt to regain their idealized images of them. For example, soon after thirteen-year-old Jim moves to town with his grandparents, Ántonia begins working for their neighbors. Jim remembers how happy he felt to be reunited with Ántonia, "How good it was to have Ántonia near us again; to see her everyday and almost every night!" (Ántonia 100). Ántonia's presence has a significant effect on Jim's developing sexuality, for he must face his feelings of jealousy when he has to share Ántonia with other people. He is no longer her only friend. Jim recalls,

I was jealous of Ántonia's admiration for Charley Harling. Because he was always first in his classes at school, and could mend the water-pipes or the doorbell and take the clock to pieces, she seemed to think him a sort of prince. Nothing that Charley wanted was too much for her. She loved to put up lunches for him when he went

hunting, to mend his ball-gloves and sew buttons on his shooting-coat, baked the kind of nut-cake he liked, and fed his setter dog when he was away on trips with his father. Ántonia had made herself cloth working-slippers out of Mr. Harling's old coats, and in these she went padding about after Charley, fairly panting with eagerness to please him. (Ántonia 100-1)

Jim does not like the fact that Ántonia begins to make a life for herself as a hired girl. This episode is a turning point in Jim and Ántonia's relationship, for it suggests that the two close friends are destined for two different paths in life. However, Jim continues to care for Ántonia; he wants to see her assume the role of the good wife and not remain a single working girl for the rest of her days. This is one reason that Jim worries about Ántonia when she goes to work for the Cutters. He knows that Wick Cutter could very easily take advantage of her, and Jim becomes aware of some major changes in Ántonia's life, for

after Ántonia went to live with the Cutters, she seemed to care about nothing but picnics and parties and having a good time. When she was not going to a dance, she sewed until midnight. Her new clothes were the subject of caustic comment. ... She went downtown nearly

every afternoon with Tiny and Lena and ... Anna.
 ... They were growing prettier everyday, but
 as they passed us, I used to think with pride
 that Ántonia, like Snow-White in the fairy tale,
 was still "fairest of them all." (Ántonia 137)

Jim's memories of Ántonia are like fairy tales themselves and influence his developing sexuality, for as Terence Martin explains, "Jim's dream of Ántonia ... is based on the memory of shared childhood experiences, its sexual significance sublimated in terms of youthful fun and adventure" (98). Despite his desire to possess her for himself, Ántonia is inaccessible to Jim. He even confesses to her, "'I'd have liked to have you for a sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister--- anything that a woman can be to a man'" (Martin 98). However, all he can do is cling to his childhood memories of Ántonia, replaying them in his mind and recording them for future generations to enjoy.

Thus, both My Ántonia and A Lost Lady focus on the profound impact of a sexually vital female on a young man's developing sexuality. Jim Burden and Niel Herbert share many common emotions and situations in regard to their memories of their special woman. For example, they each experience some type of displacement which forces them to compare past conditions with their new circumstances: Jim moves from the East coast to the Western prairies,

and Niel leaves Sweet Water for the big city. Each male must find a way to cope with the inevitable changes that occur in his life. Jim records his memories of Antonia, but never truly overcomes his infatuation with her, since he still calls her "My" Antonia. In contrast, when reminiscing with Ed Elliot, Niel pretends to have put Marian out of his mind, but as Michael Murphy points out, "The full significance of the novel rests in [Cather's] complete awareness of both the attractiveness of the past for Niel and of the destructive potential of such nostalgia. The ambivalence, not the resolution, is the point of A Lost Lady" (116). Although Niel may have temporarily put aside his memories of Marian, he can never really forget her, for she will always be a part of him and the sort of man he has become. Niel Herbert erroneously believes he has already put the past to rest, whereas Jim Burden never can forget "his Antonia."

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